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Letter dated 1 May 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to transmit herewith the fifty-fifth monthly report of the Director-General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), submitted pursuant to paragraph 12 of Security Council resolution 2118 (2013) (see annex). The present letter covers the period from 24 March to 23 April 2018.

Arrangements are continuing for assisting the Syrian Arab Republic in the destruction of the remaining two chemical weapons production facilities, of the 27 declared in total. I take note that these arrangements are expected to be finalized in the coming weeks, with destruction operations taking a further two to three months, assuming security conditions permit.

With regard to the declaration of the Syrian Arab Republic, I note that while some information received by OPCW from the Syrian Arab Republic has partially addressed the questions raised, other questions regrettably remain unanswered. The ongoing inability to resolve these outstanding issues remains a source of very deep concern. I continue to urge the Syrian Arab Republic to extend its full cooperation to OPCW in this regard.

Following the profoundly alarming allegations of the use of chemical weapons in Douma (Eastern Ghouta), an OPCW fact-finding mission team deployed to the Syrian Arab Republic to visit the relevant sites. As the Director-General states in his note (see annex), the team entered Douma on 21 April 2018 and visited one of the sites. During this visit, it collected samples and then returned to Damascus. I note that the mission is continuing to study all available information relating to this and other allegations of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. In this regard, I express my confidence in the integrity and expertise of the OPCW fact-finding mission and reaffirm my support for the OPCW.

The seriousness of these most recent allegations has further underlined the need for a dedicated, impartial, objective and independent mechanism for attributing responsibility with regard to the use of chemical weapons. I call upon the Security Council to continue to work towards this end.

Impunity and the absence of international consensus on accountability are escalating the conflict. As I have stated previously, any confirmed use of chemical weapons by any party to the conflict is abhorrent, reprehensible and a clear violation of international law. The identification of those responsible is a necessary step towards holding them to account. In failing to discharge our collective responsibility in this regard, we fail the victims of chemical weapons attacks. Impunity cannot prevail.

(Signed) António Guterres

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**Annex to the letter dated 1 May 2018 from the Secretary-General
addressed to the President of the Security Council**

[Original: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish]

I have the honour to transmit to you my report entitled "Progress in the Elimination of the Syrian Chemical Weapons Programme", prepared in accordance with the relevant provisions of the OPCW Executive Council Decision EC-M-33/DEC.1, and the United Nations Security Council resolution 2118 (2013), both dated 27 September 2013, for transmission to the Security Council. My report covers the period from 24 March 2018 to 23 April 2018 and also covers the reporting requirements of the Executive Council decision EC-M-34/DEC.1, dated 15 November 2013.

(Signed) Ahmet Üzümcü

Enclosure

[Original: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish]

Note by the Director-General**Progress in the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme****Background**

1. In accordance with subparagraph 2(f) of the decision by the Executive Council (hereinafter "the Council") at its Thirty-Third Meeting (EC-M-33/DEC.1, dated 27 September 2013), the Technical Secretariat (hereinafter "the Secretariat") is to report to the Council on a monthly basis regarding the implementation of that decision. In accordance with paragraph 12 of United Nations Security Council resolution 2118 (2013), the report by the Secretariat is also to be submitted to the Security Council through the Secretary-General.
2. The Council, at its Thirty-Fourth Meeting, adopted a decision entitled "Detailed Requirements for the Destruction of Syrian Chemical Weapons and Syrian Chemical Weapons Production Facilities" (EC-M-34/DEC.1, dated 15 November 2013). In paragraph 22 of that decision, the Council decided that the Secretariat should report on its implementation "in conjunction with its reporting required by subparagraph 2(f) of Council decision EC-M-33/DEC.1".
3. The Council, at its Forty-Eighth Meeting, adopted a decision entitled "Reports of the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission in Syria" (EC-M-48/DEC.1, dated 4 February 2015) noting the Director-General's intent to include reports of the OPCW Fact Finding Mission (FFM) in Syria, along with information on the Council's discussion thereof, as part of the monthly reporting pursuant to United Nations Security Council resolution 2118 (2013). Similarly, the Council, at its Eighty-First Session, adopted a decision entitled "Report by the Director-General Regarding the Declaration and Related Submissions by the Syrian Arab Republic" (EC-81/DEC.4, dated 23 March 2016), noting the Director General's intent to provide information on the implementation of that decision.
4. The Council, at its Eighty-Third Session, adopted a decision entitled "OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism Reports on Chemical Weapons Use in the Syrian Arab Republic" (EC-83/DEC.5, dated 11 November 2016). In subparagraph 12(a) of that decision, the Council decided that the Director-General shall "regularly inform the Council on the implementation of this decision and incorporate information regarding the implementation of this decision into his monthly reporting to the United Nations Security Council, through the United Nations Secretary-General, regarding EC-M-33/DEC.1".
5. This, the fifty-fifth monthly report, is therefore submitted in accordance with the aforementioned Council decisions and includes information relevant to the period from 24 March 2018 to 23 April 2018.

Progress achieved by the Syrian Arab Republic in meeting the requirements of Executive Council decisions EC-M-33/DEC.1 and EC-M-34/DEC.1

6. Progress by the Syrian Arab Republic is as follows:

- (a) The Secretariat has verified the destruction of 25 of the 27 chemical weapons production facilities (CWPFs) declared by the Syrian Arab Republic. As previously reported, in November 2017 the Secretariat conducted an initial inspection

of the last two stationary above-ground facilities in accordance with paragraph 44 of Part V of the Verification Annex to the Chemical Weapons Convention (hereinafter "the Convention"). Thanks to the voluntary contributions provided by States Parties to the Syria Trust Fund for the Destruction of Chemical Weapons, including contributions provided in response to the Secretariat's Note S/1541/2017 (dated 9 October 2017), the Secretariat, together with the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), has been making all the required arrangements to assist the Syrian Arab Republic in the destruction of the facilities located at these two sites. The remaining required arrangements are expected to be finalised in the coming weeks. Once the arrangements are in place, destruction operations are expected to take two to three months, subject to security conditions.

(b) On 17 April 2018, the Syrian Arab Republic submitted to the Council its fifty third monthly report (EC-88/P/NAT.2, dated 18 April 2018) regarding activities on its territory related to the destruction of its CWPFS, as required by paragraph 19 of EC M 34/DEC.1.

Progress in the elimination of Syrian chemical weapons by States Parties hosting destruction activities

7. As stated in previous reports, all of the chemicals declared by the Syrian Arab Republic that were removed from its territory in 2014 have now been destroyed.

Activities carried out by the Secretariat with respect to Executive Council decisions EC-81/DEC.4 and EC-83/DEC.5

8. During the reporting period, the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) continued its efforts to clarify all outstanding issues regarding the initial declaration of the Syrian Arab Republic in accordance with paragraph 3 of Council decision EC-81/DEC.4 and paragraph 6 of Council decision EC-83/DEC.5. On 29 January 2018, the Director General addressed a letter to the Deputy Foreign Minister of the Syrian Arab Republic, Dr Faisal Mekdad, in which he asked for further clarifications regarding activities conducted at the Scientific Studies and Research Centre (SSRC), and attached to his letter a non-exhaustive list of questions.

9. Through a note verbale dated 19 February 2018, the Syrian Arab Republic provided answers to the SSRC-related questions raised in the Director-General's letter of 29 January 2018. The DAT assessed these answers and determined that while they partially addressed some of the questions, other questions remained unanswered. The DAT's assessment of the responses provided by the Syrian Arab Republic was reported in a Note by the Director General entitled, "Report on the Work of the Declaration Assessment Team" (EC 87/HP/DG.1, dated 2 March 2018).

10. In a letter to Deputy Minister Mekdad dated 10 April 2018, the Director-General referred to this report and reiterated that unanswered questions remain and require a response. An updated non-exhaustive list of questions, including follow-up questions arising from the answers provided in the 19 February 2018 note verbale, was attached to the Director-General's letter.

11. The Director-General also repeated his request to the Syrian authorities to provide all necessary information that would assist in clarifying the remaining issues associated with the declarations and further submissions of the Syrian Arab Republic. Additionally, the Director-General restated that the Secretariat will continue to assist the Syrian Arab Republic in resolving these issues in a manner consistent with the Convention and relevant Council decisions.

Other activities carried out by the Secretariat with respect to the Syrian Arab Republic

12. UNOPS continues to provide support to the OPCW mission in the Syrian Arab Republic in accordance with the Tripartite Agreement.
13. As at the cut-off date of this report, one OPCW staff member was deployed as part of the OPCW mission in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Supplementary resources

14. As previously reported, the Trust Fund for Syria Missions was established in November 2015 to support the OPCW FFM and other remaining activities, such as those of the DAT. As at the cut-off date of this report, total contributions to this fund stood at EUR 17.1 million. Contribution agreements had been concluded with Canada, Chile, Finland, France, Germany, Monaco, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America, and the European Union.

Activities carried out with respect to the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission in Syria

15. Guided by Council decisions EC-M-48/DEC.1 and EC-M-50/DEC.1 (dated 23 November 2015), as well as by United Nations Security Council resolution 2209 (2015), the FFM continued to study all available information relating to the allegations of use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic.
16. Regarding allegations of the use of chemical weapons in Douma on 7 April, the FFM team deployed to the Syrian Arab Republic in mid-April to visit the relevant sites. Security for these sites is under the control of the Military Police of the Russian Federation. To facilitate the FFM's deployment to Douma, the United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) made arrangements for the Syrian Arab Republic to escort the FFM team to a rendezvous point, after which the security would be provided by the Military Police of the Russian Federation.
17. To further assure the safety of the FFM team in Douma, on 17 April UNDSS conducted a reconnaissance mission to two sites to assess their safety for the FFM deployment. On arrival at Site 1, a large crowd gathered and the reconnaissance team withdrew on the advice of UNDSS. At Site 2, the UNDSS team came under small arms fire and an explosive was detonated, after which the reconnaissance team left Douma to return to Damascus. FFM team members did not participate in this mission, and their deployment to Douma was subsequently postponed pending improvement of the security situation.
18. On 20 April, the UNDSS team conducted another reconnaissance mission to Douma. No incidents occurred and UNDSS determined that conditions were sufficiently secure for the FFM team to deploy. The FFM team entered Douma on 21 April, visited one of the sites, collected samples, and returned safely to Damascus the same day.

Conclusion

19. The main focus of the future activities of the OPCW mission in the Syrian Arab Republic will be on the activities of the FFM and on the implementation of Council decisions EC-83/DEC.5 and EC-81/DEC.4, including declaration-related issues, as well as on the verification of the destruction of the two stationary above-ground facilities, and annual inspections of the underground structures already verified as destroyed.